

Gladden, Baxter named Depot Athletes of the Year

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Two Depot softball players were recently selected by Marine Corps Community Services-South Carolina as the Depot's 2003 Athletes of the Year.

Gunnery Sgt. Alonzo Baxter, staff NCOIC, Academic Instruction Unit, and Cpl. Kimberly Gladden, Consolidated Memorandum Receipt clerk, Property Control Division, were determined to have achieved the most success in their respective sports throughout the year, after careful consideration by the MCCS-SC Athletic Department.

Both Baxter and Gladden were able to take their softball playing to the next level, by not only achieving success in the Depot's intramural leagues, but also outside the gates of Parris Island.

Baxter began paving his way to athletic success in high school, where he played varsity football, basketball and baseball. In basketball, he made the All-Regional list, and in baseball he was selected as All-State. Since joining the Marine Corps in 1991, Baxter has been working on perfecting his softball game. He got the opportunity to play on the men's All-Marine Softball Team as right centerfielder in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

In 2000, the team won the All-Armed Forces Men's Softball Championship, and Baxter was selected as an All-Tournament player. His success did not go unnoticed that year, as he was named the Male Athlete of the Year for Camp Pendleton, Calif.

"I didn't even know that the honor existed until they told me about it then," said the 32-year-old. "Needless to say, I didn't set out to win it."

This past year marked the seventh time that Baxter was presented with a chance to represent the Marine Corps in softball and his second time being named Male Athlete of the Year by an installation. Although he declined the invitation to go to the Men's All-Marine Softball Trials, his batting

alone during the 2003 intramural softball seasons could be argued as enough reason for the nomination of Athlete of the Year, including one unparalleled two-game stint where he hit 10 home runs.

"It's a big deal to me," said Baxter of receiving the recognition. "Everybody wants to be a winner. It's an honor, no matter how many people I may have been going up against."

Despite all the success in recent years, Baxter admitted he was not always a "winner." During his first few tryouts for the All-Marine Team, Baxter did not make the cut. Since then, he has formulated a dynamic regime that has helped him overhaul his entire game.

"You can't just focus on one area," said the six-foot-two-inch, 205-pound power-hitter. "You have to lift weights, practice batting, practice fielding and run sprints. Don't just practice what you're good at."

Baxter's work ethic has paid off, as he has reached a sense of satisfaction in his abilities.

"I just want to be the best I can be and the best in the Corps," he said. "I actually think that I am the best. I've felt that way since 2000, and my game is even better now."

Although his proclamations may be bold, Baxter is not boastful about his abilities in the least. Instead, he remains grounded and shares tips with other athletes.

"No matter how good you are, you can still learn something," he said. "You have to be able to take constructive criticism and always ask questions. I'm always watching and taking in everything."

This same sort of hunger for being the best can be seen in Gladden, who has been playing in men's leagues since graduating high school. She one of five females who played in the 2003 men's intramural softball league.

"I prefer playing with the men," said the first baseman. "I like the speed and quickness they bring."

After two seasons playing with the men, Gladden helped 4th Bn. go undefeated and win first place in the Depot's women's league. Once intramural play was over,



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Kimberly Gladden fields a ball during practice at the Depot softball fields Tuesday. Gladden played on the 2003 All-Marine Women's Softball Team and was selected as the 2003 Depot Female Athlete of the Year.

she was selected to attend to the All-Marine Women's Softball Trials in Miramar, Calif., where she was selected as one of 15 players to represent the Marine Corps at the All-Armed Forces Women's Softball Championship.

Gladden said she was grateful to be selected after seeing the level of competition she was up against.

"I never expected it to be so tough," said the 30-year-old. "I knew I had the ability, but the girls were a lot younger than me and very agile."

Gladden's 22 years experience in the sport paid off, and in her first year with the All-Marines, she helped the team come in fourth place. She hopes to be a part of the team again next year and help them go even further.

"The Marine Corps has never won a medal in women's softball," she said. "If everybody comes back next year, we should have a good shot."

In the meantime, Gladden plans to continue improving her game in preparation for the next season.

"I learned a lot at camp," she

said. "I plan to utilize some of those techniques in an effort to get better. I need to work on my batting and I want to increase my upper body strength."

Striving to improve is not the only thing that keeps Gladden on the softball field, however. She relies on the game to satisfy a number of needs.

"I love to play," said the mother of five. "It gives me joy and a sense of accomplishment. It's a stress reliever."

Gladden says she loves the impact her competitiveness has had on her kids, as well.

"When they see me out there playing, it helps them to strive to go further," she said. "They realize that you never know until you try."

Gladden never expected to become the Depot's Female Athlete of the Year, since she was not even aware that the award existed. She was gracious when she learned of her nomination.

"To be recognized out of all the players on base is a big deal," she said. "I've been ecstatic ever since I found out."



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Alonzo Baxter swings away in a game during the intramural softball post season tournament at the Depot softball fields July 10. Baxter was selected by MCCS-SC as the Depot's 2003 Male Athlete of the Year.

Gladden and Baxter are scheduled to be honored by the commanding general in a ceremony in front of Barrow Hall Jan. 23. Their selection as the Depot's Athletes

of the Year automatically qualifies them for consideration for the 2003 Marine Corps Athletes of the Year, to be determined by Headquarters Marine Corps.